

LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY. MOTHER OF CHRIST;

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES, AND THE BEST TRADITIONS OF THE
EAST, AS ACCEPTED BY THE GREEK AND LATIN FATHERS

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I.

Of Mary the Mother of our Lord, and of His reputed father, Joseph, the Gospels only make such mention as connects them with His personal history. But when He had ascended into Heaven, and when the religion which He had founded spread throughout the East and the West, filling not only Palestine but the surrounding countries with flourishing Christian churches, it was both natural and inevitable that every follower of His should feel a deep interest in knowing all about these revered parents of His and their entire family. And this inquiry was stimulated by the misstatements and calumnies of the Jews regarding Mary and Joseph.

We need only recall the names of a few of the early Christian writers who record the traditions collected in Judaea itself, in the very places where the Mother of Christ and her family had lived—traditions coming down to us from the age of the Apostles, put in writing by their disciples, and repeated by the most enlightened and saintly scholars of the four succeeding centuries. Foremost among these names stands that of S. JEROME; not, as everybody knows, that he is first in the order of time, but because, in the opinion of all who believe in Christ, he labored most successfully in the native land of Jesus and Mary and Joseph, to gather and transmit to all coming generations the inspired writings of

the Old and the New Testaments, together with all the historical knowledge which could throw light on them.

After S. Jerome come S. Justin Martyr, the great Origen, S. Epiphanius and S. John Damascene (both natives of Palestine), S. Gregory of Nyssa and S. Gregory Nazianzen, natives of Asia Minor, like Origen; S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. John Chrysostom (a native of Antioch); S. Ambrose and S. Augustine, both contemporaries of S. Jerome. Such are a few of the sainted names which vouch for the existence and the authority of the traditions relating to the parentage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to her birth and early life up to the point where S. Luke and S. Matthew take up the thread of the narrative in their Gospels. The same respected authorities supply the facts of Mary's life after

the Ascension of our Lord. She was too dear to the heart of the early church, to the grateful veneration of the last and best beloved disciple of the Lord, John the Evangelist, not to

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be cared for reverently and tenderly by all these fervent followers of the Master; so that the details of her latest life and of her blessed death must have been remembered and recorded by the first generations of Christians—her own spiritual children all of them—most of them her own countrymen, and many of them her blood-relations.

With these preliminary remarks we may confidently enter upon

our task—that of condensing into a few pages the Life of her who is the Second Eve, the Mother of the True Life, most dear to every one who holds Christ to be the Second Adam, the Messiah, the Restorer and Saviour of our race.

II.

The birth-place of Mary was that same town of Nazareth, in Lower Galilee, where was also the home of Joseph, and where, during the first thirty years of His life, the Word Incarnate was to live in obscurity and toil. S. Justin Martyr, himself a native of Palestine, who defended the faith by his writings and died for it, within fifty years after the death of S. John the Evangelist, says, that Mary was descended in a direct line from King David. Her father's name was Joachim. The Jewish writers give him also the name of Heli; the Arabic traditions of Palestine and the early commentators of the Koran call him Imram or Amram. His wife's name was Anna or Hanna, according to these same authorities. She was of the tribe of Levi.

Of these two venerable personages S. John Damascene writes as one who is only giving utterance to the living, uninterrupted testimony of the populations of Lower Galilee, when he eulogizes their virtues. This universal veneration, as soon as the Christian Religion was allowed to be professed openly, found its expression in the churches erected in the East under the invocation of S. Joachim and S. Anna. The Emperor Justinian, in 550, had one built in Constantinople, which bore the name of S. Anna down to the conquest of the city by the Turks. The reverence thus paid from the beginning of Christianity to the immediate ancestors of our Lord, is founded both on their own recorded holiness of life and on the exquisite jealousy with which the Christian conscience watched over everything nearly related to the great fact of the Incarnation. The early heretics denied its reality; asserted that the body born of the Virgin and nailed to the cross was only a shadowy body, but no substantial human flesh; in a word, that Christ was no true man, and only had the outward appearance of one. Hence the scrupulousness with which every circumstance was examined that bore on the all-important fact of His being in very deed, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," as well as "True God of True God."

The veneration paid to His Mother and her parents was reflected on Christ Himself, while it strengthened in the mind of the believer the faith in the God made Man. Hence the piety, borne witness to by Justinian at Constantinople and by S. John Chrysostom at Antioch, was the same that inspired the youthful Martin Luther, long ages afterward, to vow to S. Ann to embrace a monastic life. It was that which prompted the populations of Brittany to pay such devout homage to *Sainte Anne d'Auray*, and the first Canadian colonists to build, on the shore of the S. Lawrence, that famous chapel before which, departing and returning, every vessel cast anchor, in order that the crew might go thither to worship Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, to beseech, on their journey across the deep, the protection of Mary's sainted mother, or to thank her for their delivery from storm and shipwreck. All this was natural to true believers.

It is said that the child Mary was set, like Samuel to the pious Anna of the Old Testament, as a reward to ardent prayer after long sterility. The Moslem traditions, echoing those of the Galilean populations, affirm that the mother of the Blessed Virgin, when she first knew that her prayer was heard, knelt in thanksgiving, and said: "O Lord, I vow to consecrate to Thee the child which Thou hast given me: accept graciously my offering, O Thou to whom everything is known." And this same voice of Arab tradition, echoing the constant belief of the early Christians of Palestine,

attests also the privilege claimed for Mary by the Church, and solemnly decreed as an article of faith on December 8, 1854—that of having been, by a special application of the saving grace of her Son, preserved from the stain of original sin. This is what is called her "Immaculate Conception." It was most fitting that the Second Eve, the humble and self-sacrificing parent of our redeemed humanity, should have been, at the very instant when soul and body were united, as free from every stain of moral evil as the first Eve, when the Almighty hand formed her body from out the substance of sinless Adam, and poured the breath of life into it. Even the Jewish traditions, long before the coming of Christ, affirmed the current belief from the days of the Patriarchs and from the beginning, that the stain of Adam's sin was not to touch the Messiah or His Mother. Mohammed himself bore witness to the universal existence of this belief among the nations descended from Abraham, whether Christian or not.

Anna's blessed child was born on September 8, in the year of Rome 734, that is, twenty years before the Christian era. In the Koran (chapter iii.), it is said that when the babe was born, her mother said: "O God, I have brought into the world a daughter, and have named her Miriam (*Mary*). I place both her and her posterity under Thy protection; preserve them from the designs of Satan."

The solemn ceremony of naming a new-born babe was performed by the Jews on the eighth day after the birth. Hence it is that the solemnity of the Holy Name of Mary is celebrated by the Church on the Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity, or that following the 8th of September. When the child had attained her third year, her parents, in fulfilment of their vow to consecrate her to God, took her from Nazareth to Jerusalem, and gave her up to the priests to be educated within the vast precincts of the temple, where other children, similarly dedicated by vow to the life of Nazarites, were brought up together.

From the first age of Christianity a house was pointed out to pilgrims and visitors as the house of S. Ann. Over this spot, as over every other made sacred by memories connected with our Lord and His Mother, the faithful kept loving watch throughout the evil days of Moslem domination. And we should not forget that, inasmuch as S. Ann herself was held in great reverence by the followers of the Koran, so when Jerusalem fell into their hands, they hastened to change into a mosque or place of Mohammedan worship, the oratory built on the site by the Christians. So did they manifest their veneration for all other places held most dear by Christians; their special regard for burial-places forbidding them from appropriating to their own religious uses the church raised over the Holy Sepulchre by S. Helena. When the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem and established a kingdom in Palestine, their piety led them to build churches and monasteries at all spots in the Holy City and throughout the kingdom hallowed by the memory of our Lord, His Mother, and His ancestors. Thus they erected a monastery with a church on the traditional site of the house of S. Ann; when Jerusalem fell afterward into the hands of Saladin, the church and monastery became a mosque, held in very great respect by its new masters.

Even so near the splendid mosque of Omar (*El-Aksa*), which a this day occupies the site of the temple, is a smaller one, *Es-Sakhra* ("the Rock"), built on the spot where Mary and the other maidens, bound by Nazarite vows, lived during their seclusion. Thus, we have monumental records recalling the childhood and girlhood of our Lady.

The Crusaders converted the humble chapel which stood on this "Rock," into a splendid church, surmounted by a gilt cupola and a lofty cross. Here, then, was spent the life of the Blessed Virgin

from her third year upward. It was during the rule of Herod the Great, an Idumean, who had married Mariamne, a descendant of the Machabean line of princes, and thereby conciliated the favor of some of the most influential among the Jews. He restored the temple with the utmost magnificence, thus still further winning popular applause. He also built Cesarea on the sea-coast of the Mediterranean, naming it after the Emperor Augustus, together with other important cities here and there. But, to offset the service rendered to the national religion by the restoration and adornment of the temple, he erected in the cities, by him founded, magnificent houses of worship to the gods of Rome.

It was while this clever, but unscrupulous, prince was pushing forward the costly works on the temple, that Mary was being educated within its precincts.

In what this education consisted we can only conjecture from the ascertained Jewish customs of that age, and from the fragmentary passages of Eastern fathers. The "Proto-Gospel of S. James," a work held in general esteem during the first centuries of the Christian era, describes Mary as seated before a spindle of wool dyed purple. The Jews had borrowed and inherited from their neighbors, the Phenicians, the art of giving to the fabrics they wove that exquisite purple dye so much prized in the ancient world. Besides this, S. Epiphanius says that the Blessed Virgin was skilled in embroidery, and in weaving wool, fine linen, and cloth of gold. Especially careful were the priests, after the Captivity, to teach these privileged maidens, and all the youth of the upper classes, the knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. What the study of these must have been to one "full of grace," like the future Mother of the Redeemer, we need only suggest to the intelligent reader.

In these peaceful studies and useful occupations, varied

by the stirring scenes of the gorgeous Jewish worship, passed Mary's girlhood. Meanwhile, as tradition informs us, both her parents closed a holy life by the death of the saints. Her father died first, when his daughter was in her thirteenth year; and she returned to Nazareth to the house of her widowed mother. When the latter was also called to her reward, it became the duty of her nearest relatives to find her a protector and a husband among her own tribesmen, in accordance with the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law.

S. Gregory of Nyssa, who follows the best traditions of the

East, relates that the noble maiden was unwilling to be bound by the ties of matrimony, and besought her kinsfolk to allow her to return to the temple and continue there the secluded Virginal life which alone had a charm for her. To this they peremptorily refused to consent; and the orphan had, perforce, to choose the man who should be her husband and protector—one who, in the hidden councils of God, was to be the guardian of the Messiah and His Mother, their devoted companion and support—and, through all the Christian ages, the Protector, under God, of all those who believe in the Saviour.

Here come in the beautiful legends which have inspired Christian art, concerning the rivalry among the unwedded kinsmen of Mary for the honor of claiming her as bride. Among the descendants

of David assembled in Nazareth, or in Jerusalem, at the town-house of Joachim and Ann, was Joseph, who, impoverished, as were most of his kinsfolk, supported himself amid the hills and obscurity of Galilee, by following the trade of what the Gospels call "a carpenter," or what we would more properly call "a cabinet-maker." Among the many thriving cities and industrious populations of Galilee, the art of inlaying was much in demand. He too, like Mary, like the numerous bodies of Essenes, who practiced a life of self-imposed abstinence and seclusion, aiming at a moral perfection above the reach of the multitude—aspired to the Virginal life. By what inspiration, then, was he impelled to be a suitor for the hand of his kinswoman? Or were the names of all the persons eligible for that honor submitted to the Maiden in a list, permitting her to draw by lot from among the number? Having to be so intimately connected with the Saviour in His helpless infancy and childhood, Joseph was, of course, under a special providence; and our own



THE ANNUNCIATION..

Christian sense must divine and supply many links in the chain of facts that fill up his history.

S. Jerome, recalling the ancient tradition preserved in the narrative of the "Proto-Gospel of S. James," tells us that the suitors, after praying to Him in whose hand are our lots, brought each to the temple a rod of almond-tree, and left it over night before the altar. On the morrow, that which bore the name of Joseph had blossomed. It was a renewal of the miracle by which God in the Old Law had confirmed the sons of Aaron in the priestly office. This is the event referred to in

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Raphael's first and pure master-piece, "The Marriage of the Blessed Virgin."

Mary, become the wife of the blameless and high-minded man thus selected by Providence, went to reside in her ancestral home at Nazareth. It is six months after the message delivered to Zachary in the temple—that he shall be given a son to be called John. He shall be great before the Lord . . . shall be filled with the Holy Ghost before his birth. He is the precursor of the Messiah, who shall herald the approach of the long-expected Saviour and point Him out, walking the earth in our flesh. The "fulness of time" has come. From before the throne of the Highest the same angelic messenger descends to announce the accomplishment of what is God's work above all others.

"The Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a Virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the Virgin's name was MARY. And the Angel being come in, said unto her: *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou among women; who, having heard, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be.*"

"The lowly maiden, among the many graces with which her soul overflowed, above all, possessed humility. She was alarmed, not so much by the presence of the angel, as by the reverence with which he addressed her. The divine favors already lavished upon her have not begotten pride. It is a characteristic of Christian sanctity, that its possessors, while intensely grateful to the Divine Goodness for every favor in the natural and supernatural order, are still most painfully conscious of their own shortcomings. The nearer God lifts them to Himself the more exalted becomes their ideal of moral perfection, the more severely do they compare what they are at the present moment, with what they might and ought to be. But the dignity that awaits Mary, singular and incomparable as it is, had never entered into the visions of attainable holiness presented to her mind by the Spirit of God.

"The Angel calms her fears by announcing the object of his mission. She is divinely chosen in the eternal counsels to be the mother of the long-promised Redeemer, JESUS. *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord shall give to Him the throne of David, His father, and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*" The youth of Mary, her voluntary or enforced poverty, and her having placed herself as an affianced bride under the protection of a kinsman, . . . have not deadened in her bosom the yearning for the appearance of 'the Orient from on High,' the longing for the restoration of her own royal house. Patriotism and religion were intended by God to be one undivided and absorbing sentiment in the breast of every Hebrew woman as well as man. The daughter of David, then, must have been thrilled by the Heaven-sent assurance of the resurrection of David's line, of the coming glory and eternity of the new kingdom. But that it should be through son of hers overwhelms her. Genuine humility is not littleness of soul: it merely gives the soul an intense feeling of the distance which exists between what our own will has made us, and what God wills us to be. It is, therefore, at bottom, a vivid sense of the deficiency of one's own will in conforming with the Divine. But when it becomes clearly known to the humble soul that God requires of her the sublimest efforts of self-sacrifice, her very humility being a supernatural and irresistible tendency toward accomplishing His purpose, she puts forth a strength and a magnanimity all divine in doing what is most heroic and most painful.

"Did the divine light which must have flooded that favored soul

on this occasion—unique in the whole economy of the supernatural government—enable Mary to perceive that, to become the Mother of the Second Adam she must fulfil the part of the Second Eve? that His triumph must be through suffering; that His diadem was to be a crown of thorns, and His death that of an executed criminal, the horror and abomination of His own and of all civilized peoples? If so, her acceptance of such motherhood meant a share in all this shame and torture of soul. Thus was humility satisfied; it should have its sublimest satisfaction in the cross, in her companionship with the Crucified.

"Light having been given her to understand the operations of the Divine Power, and the scruples both of her humility and her purity having been removed by the words of the Angel, she bows herself to the Divine Will, and accepts the awful responsibilities of Mother of the Redeemer. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word. And the Angel departed from her.*" (HEROIC WOMEN OF THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH.)

She was related on her mother's side, at least, to Elizabeth and Zachary, the parents of the Baptist, whose approaching birth the Angel had revealed to her. Probably these noble relatives had been the comforters of Anna in her widowhood, and the consolers as well of Mary herself in the first period of her orphaned life. Her first thought is to visit their privileged home. It was a long journey to the southern extremity of Juda, and over perilous roads. But the Spirit who henceforth is the very soul of that Blessed Mother's soul, is one of generosity; and Mary goes on her way rejoicing. She is the Ark of the New Covenant, bearing over the mountains and through the valleys of Judæa, not the manna put within the former ark by Moses together with the Tables of the Law. Here is He, who is the true Bread of Life, the Divine Law-Giver, the very "Angel of the Testament" Himself. And as Mary crosses the threshold of Elizabeth, John feels the presence of Jesus; at the approach of "the Bridegroom," His "Friend" is quickened with the pulses of a new life. His mother "cried out with a loud voice . . . Blessed art thou among women! . . . And whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" . . .

Mary, unwilling to deny what has been revealed to her saintly kinswoman, only thinks of referring the homage paid to herself to Him from whom every perfect gift descendeth. The light of prophecy floods her soul, as the future ages are spread out before her, and she pours forth the strains of the sublime song, which has ever since been the hymn of Christian triumph and thanksgiving:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!
Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid;
For behold from henceforth all nations shall call me Blessed.
For He that is Mighty hath done great things to me,
And Holy is His name."

"Three months did Mary abide with Elizabeth, not seeking the public eye, but both of them communing with God in prayer, in obedience to the Holy Spirit who filled them; and increasing in their own souls the zeal for His glory and for the salvation of His people. So entirely does Mary trust to the divine wisdom to disclose the secret of her heart, that, on her return to Nazareth, she makes no mention of it to Joseph. She is rewarded for her absolute trust: an angel is sent to this prudent and God-fearing man to apprise him of the Treasure lying hidden beneath his roof. He is thenceforth to be the faithful steward in God's family on earth, guarding and cherishing the two Beings in all creation the most precious in the sight of Heaven—that exalted Mother and her

babe. Joseph too, if not in very deed a Nazarite like John, received a portion above his brethren: Christ, during His helpless infancy and boyhood, was to be his sole care and portion. Christ and His Mother were to look up to him, under God's providence, as their head, guide and support. He could not but understand, once the Angel of the Lord had revealed to him Mary's secret, that of all just men whom Heaven had most favored till then, none were so privileged as himself. For beneath his lowly roof he now held the new Parents of restored humanity foreshown to Adam and Eve in the Garden. On his head were accumulated the blessings prophesied by Jacob to the first Joseph (Gen. xlvi. 25, 26): 'the blessings of Heaven above, with the blessings of the deep that lieth beneath, until the desire of the everlasting hills shall come.' He has come; ere long Joseph shall look upon His face, and hold Him in his arms, and hear His voice uttering words of filial love and gratitude." —(HEROIC WOMEN OF THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH.)

III.

The glory of our Second Eve is, that her life, from this period to the Ascension of her Son, will be identified with His; and that from His Ascension till her death at Ephesus, her sole care was to sustain and comfort the infant Church, so sorely tried in Palestine.

In Bethlehem Joseph was born, and to Bethlehem a mere accident compels Joseph and Mary to go, just as she is about to give birth to her child. They went thither in obedience to an Imperial Decree enjoining on all persons within the Roman empire to be registered in their native places. S. John the Evangelist, a near relative of the Blessed Virgin, and the disciple so dearly loved by her Son, says of the Incarnate Word, the Light of the World: "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Whatever may have been the circumstances that explain the fact—the fact is recorded by the Gospel, that in Bethlehem, the city of David, where Booz bestowed on Ruth, the Moabite, such kindly countenance and courteous hospitality, no one house was opened, at the hour of her sorest need, to the greatest of David's daughters, the gentle Mother of the Messiah. . . . They arrived, sore-footed and weary, at its gates, when night had already fallen. The town was full. "There was no room for them in the Inn." They sought, on the outskirts of the town, one of those natural caves, the shelter for the shepherd in stormy weather, the refuge of the poor way-farer at all times. "And she brought forth her first-born Son and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger."

We do not deplore that it so befell both Mother and Babe. It was meet that He who came to "make all things new" in the world of morality, should have elected to be born in the most abject destitution. He had come to condemn the ill-uses of wealth, and to inculcate the blessedness of that spirit which despises riches in themselves, and sets store solely on the Eternal Kingdom and the supernatural virtues that lead to it. . . . So, she looks, first of all human beings, at that midnight hour, on the face of her Babe and her Saviour. What ecstasy filled her soul as the light of that countenance, that so many generations had vainly wished to behold, made all bright for her and for her saintly guardian, Joseph, in that hillside cavern! These two were the first worshippers, as they were to be the two inseparable companions and faithful Disciples of the Divine Master—the great Teacher of the Manger and the Cross. They were called "His Parents." And as such they are unspeakably dear to the Christian world.

Who are those who are first summoned to the presence of the

new-born King, the Day-Star of Israel, the Hope of the world? Shepherds guarding their flocks by night. "And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the brightness of God shone round about them, and they feared with a great fear. And the Angel said to them: Fear not. For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people. For this day is born to you a SAVIOUR, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger."

To these poor folk, the first called to the knowledge of Christ and to the everlasting glories of His Kingdom, a foretaste is there given of the society which Christians are to share here and hereafter. "Suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.*" These first courtiers of the Saviour-King, as well as all His followers to the end of time, must accustom themselves to behold with the eyes of faith the splendors of that unseen world, in which Christ reigns, ministered to by myriads of these bright angelic spirits.

There is one sentence recorded of Mary, in the passage, which recounts the visit of the Shepherds to the new-born Babe. They had found "Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger. And, seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning the Child. And all that heard wondered . . . But Mary kept all these words, pondering in her heart." The sole study of this Mother of the incarnate God, was to know Him and His mysteries. Knowing Him, therefore, better than all others, she walked more closely in His footsteps, treading, not in the paths where honor and applause might reach her on His account, but in the ways of obscurity, deep enlightened love and heroic suffering.

The eighth day came, and the parents, following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, took the Child to the Priest to have Him circumcised, in conformity with the Law. In every particular both He and they wished to give an example of perfect obedience. He had taken to Himself the flesh of Adam, in order so to hallow it by the union, that it might be our ransom on the cross. In circumcision the redeeming blood begins to flow, and the divine humility that was to shine forth in His Passion, already manifests itself in Bethlehem. Then was He given the name of JESUS, by Joseph, in compliance with the injunction of the Angel.

Mary and Joseph were soon afterward gladdened by the coming of the Magi—the "Three Wise Men," or "Three Kings" from the East. It was a memorable event. Jerusalem, where the standards and eagles of Imperial Rome were displayed on the Antonia Tower, overlooking the temple, and where the Idumean Herod was acknowledged as king, knew that the "sceptre had passed out of Juda," and, therefore, that the promised Saviour must be nigh. He had already come, and Jerusalem and Judaea knew it not. They expected a mighty Prince, manifesting himself with more than the warlike genius of David and the far-reaching wisdom of Solomon. And lo! He lay hidden in a wayside cavern, at Bethlehem, swathed with the clothes of infancy, and laid in a manger! This was not the Messiah who could challenge the acceptance and worship of the worldly-minded Jews.

But in the depths of the mysterious East, through which the Israelites had been scattered, God had ever had among the idolatrous nations men who cherished the universal belief in a future Redeemer and Restorer, and looked anxiously forward to His coming. This faith of the Patriarchs, preserved, though obscured, among the Gentiles, was confirmed by contact with the dispersed Israelites, and by the holy lives of such men as the elder Tobias

and his son and kinsfolk. There are three of these noble watchers for the STAR that was to "rise out of Jacob," the "Sceptre" that was to "spring up from Israel." They had counted the years assigned by prophecy for His apparition; and God had rewarded their faith by an extraordinary light in the Heavens, while His Spirit spoke to their hearts. They had formed a holy companionship in faith and good works amid the surrounding unbelief and corruption; and now they are companions on the road to Christ.

The Gospel admirably tells their story up to their arrival in Bethlehem. What joy filled the hearts of Mary and Joseph at the sight of these kingly pilgrims from afar! Not on shepherds alone, then, had the Day-Star of Bethlehem arisen; not alone for the poor and lowly was His Kingdom; nor alone over the minds and hearts of the Israelites was His reign to extend. He was to gather all nations to Himself by the irresistible force of Truth and Charity.

Herod, alarmed by the coming of the noble Pilgrims, and the tidings that the King Messiah was born, only waited for their return to Jerusalem and the precise information expected from them, to pay his visit to Mother and Babe. We know what fell purpose he entertained.

The Three First Worshippers from among the Gentiles are gone as they came—in haste; their path lies not toward Jerusalem, where a dark and unsparing State-policy is plotting the destruction of the Prince of Peace, and their own as well; but God's Angel guides them safely towards their own people, whom they are to leaven with faith in the Redeemer.

"And after they were departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying, Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt; and be there until I shall tell thee . . . who arose, and took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt; and he was there until the death of Herod." Instantly, in the dead of the night, without hesitation or murmur, and trusting themselves to the ever-watchful care of Providence, Joseph and Mary betook them to flight. Not a moment too soon. For the spies of Herod had warned him of the departure of the Wise Men, and his minions were already on their way to Bethlehem. The fugitives were yet amid the secret passes of Carmel, when the sword of the first persecutor "killed all the men-children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old, and under."

What route Joseph chose along the southern sea-coast we have no means of ascertaining. Doubtless he avoided the most frequented, because, while firmly relying on the angelic guidance in case of great need, he used all his own sagacity in avoiding every danger to his precious charge. Nor do we know with anything like an approach to certainty, in what city or village of Egypt the Holy Family fixed their abode while waiting for the order to return to Palestine. It is likely that Joseph, in his prudence, would shun the cities where he might find large colonies of his countrymen, and with them emissaries of Herod. A quiet country hamlet, where his skill in working wood could provide for the sustenance of the two beings he worshipped, would most naturally fix the choice of Christ's devoted Guardian. As the precise date of Herod's death is unknown, so also is the duration of the Holy Family's stay in Egypt.

If by any chance the Blessed Mother learned, while there, the cruel massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem and its neighborhood, how much more keenly her heart felt the wound made by the first mortal peril that threatened the life of her Babe! Already, even before Holy Simeon prophesied about the sword which was to pierce her on Calvary, she felt its point searching her soul. The Church, in after ages, called her the "Queen of Martyrs." She was in

reality such while yet in Egypt. For the babes so inhumanly slain in Bethlehem were only the first glorious band in that great army of Martyrs, who were to bear witness with their blood to the Divinity of the Lamb.

At length, the angelic messenger bade Joseph return to Judæa. "Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel." With the same promptness and unquestioning simplicity Joseph executes the divine command. He is the head of God's family on earth; to him is the divine will intimated; and to him it belongs to see it executed, both the Word Incarnate and His Mother yielding implicit obedience to Joseph. In these last years, as the nineteenth century draws to its close, the Church has solemnly declared S. Joseph to be, under God, her protector and the guardian of all her interests. Why should he, who made of Christ and His interests, in infancy, childhood and youth, the one absorbing care of his life—not continue in Heaven to be the guardian and protector of all those who are dear to Christ?

And so, Joseph "arose and took the Child and His Mother, and came into the land of Israel. But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judæa in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither; and, being warned in sleep, retired into the quarters of Galilee. And coming, he dwelt in a city called Nazareth."

The death of Herod, and the horror caused by the massacre of the innocents, produced a reaction in the public mind. People were naturally averse to blood and persecution. Moreover, the multitude who did not take pains to inquire minutely into the truth of things, fancied that the Babe mistaken for King Messiah by the Wise Men, must have perished in the wholesale butchery ordered by Herod. Mary, then, once restored with her infant to her obscure and peaceful abode in Nazareth, had no reason to delay the ceremony prescribed by the law, of presenting her Son in the temple of Jerusalem, and making the offering customary on this occasion. Joseph chose the opportune season, and guided the Blessed Mother on her way. They acted throughout in perfect conformity with the divine plan revealed to them, that they should conceal from the outer world the quality and mission of the Child they called their own. They left it to the Spirit of God to enlighten privileged individuals concerning the Messiah.

Mary, in presenting to the Lord in His temple, her own first-born, offered with Him a pair of turtle-doves. It was the offering of the poor; and she made no apology for it. The priests in attendance performed their function; no thought about the possibility of this child of poor parents being the Messiah, crossed their mind; no light from on high disclosed the Emmanuel . . . Two holy souls were there, however, to whom He revealed Himself—Simeon and Anna; the former, like the Three Wise Men in the East, yearning to look upon the face of his Redeemer before he closed his eyes; the latter, a saintly widow, now in her eighty-fourth year, "who departed not from the temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day."

Simeon "came by the Spirit into the temple. And when His parents brought in the Child Jesus, . . . he also took Him in his arms, and blessed God, and said: *Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace. Because my eyes have seen Thy salvation. . . .* And His father and mother were wondering at these things wh^{ch} were spoken concerning Him. And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His Mother: Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, for a sign wh^{ch} shall be contradicted. *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.*"

Anna also "at the same hour coming in, confessed to the Lord

and spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel."

The ceremony of Purification and Presentation ended, Mary and Joseph were not tempted, by this extraordinary occurrence in the temple, to remain in Jerusalem, and expose their Treasure to new perils by attracting to Him the attention even of the devout among the citizens. They hastened back to Galilee, and buried themselves with all their hopes and fears beneath the roof which had sheltered Joachim and Anna. "And the Child grew, and waxed strong, full of wisdom; and the grace of God was in Him."

Of the life which the Holy Family led in their lowly home at Nazareth, from the Presentation of Christ up to His twelfth year, no other account is given in the Gospel, save only that "His parents went every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the Pasch." The privilege they had of possessing Him who was above the Law, from whom indeed the Law had come, never prevented them from fulfilling in letter and in spirit its injunctions. They were content to bide God's own appointed time for Christ's manifestation in Israel.

But the sword of which Simeon had prophesied daily probed the bosom of the anxious Mother. She knew that His blood was to redeem the world. The time and manner alone remained a secret hidden from her motherly heart. She naturally feared every year's appointed festivals calling them to Jerusalem, lest His visit there should verify Simeon's prediction. This throws a light on the next event recorded in the blended lives of Mother and Son.

"And when He was twelve years old, they going up into Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast, and having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem; and His parents knew it not. And thinking that He was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And not finding Him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the Temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers. And seeing Him, they wondered. And His Mother said to Him: Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And He said to them: How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business? And they understood not the word that He spoke unto them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth; and was subject to them. And His Mother kept all these words in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and men."

In this most simple and beautiful narrative stand out conspicuously, the absorbing love of Mary and Joseph for the Boy-Saviour; their solicitude for His safety, their keen sorrow at not finding Him "among their kinsfolk and acquaintance;" the affectionate freedom with which they remonstrate with Him for having left their company. This accords with what we have already written: *that the interests of Jesus are those of Joseph and Mary.* The Mother on missing her Divine Son, feels the sword already piercing her soul. Joseph's fatherly heart experiences a different, though scarcely less poignant sorrow, at the thought of his charge being possibly in the clutches of Herod's successor. We are also plainly taught that the Wisdom Incarnate, who astonished the doctors and their audience by His questions and His answers, had already been instructing Mary and Joseph about the supernatural purpose for which He was come down among men. "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" The liberty which they allowed their

EMMANUEL to be about this "business," whenever the Spirit prompted Him, was one cause of His being separated from their company. He wished to show that, being the Messiah, He could at any time He thought fit enter upon His public mission, and shed abroad among men the light of His doctrine. Having thus, in the presence of all, and within the temple of which He was the Divinity, asserted His fulness of knowledge, His divine Sonship, and His independence, He at once goes with His parents, and resumes His former position of dutiful obedience in the household of Nazareth.

Another suggestion is made in the text. The Holy Family, on their way to and from Jerusalem, have for companions their "kinsfolk and acquaintance." Neither Mary nor Joseph, though of the house of David, are without dear and near relatives in Nazareth and the neighboring cities of Galilee. It was the time for the Evangelist to make mention of other children in the home of the carpenter. They only speak of "kinsfolk" or "brethren," as the Jewish custom denominated all blood relations.

And so, one brief and pregnant sentence describes the remaining years of the Master, till, in His thirtieth, He quitted His home in Nazareth to preach the "good tidings" to His countrymen. "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them. And His Mother kept all these words in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and men."

Thenceforward, till His thirtieth year, Christ continued to abide at Nazareth, passing, in the eyes of the people of the place, for the son of Joseph. The veil which covered His origin and dignity was never raised by either parent. . . . "We are apt to look upon this portion of His earthly life as lost, and disposed to blame either the influence exercised on Him by His Mother, or the poverty of Joseph; or, again, to criticize the divine economy for permitting these precious, teeming years of His boyhood and youth to be spent in a little country town. . . . We forget that these long years of obscurity, obedience, progress in wisdom, in every virtue which can grace manhood, and in patient, uncomplaining toil beneath the carpenter's roof, were destined by the Eternal Wisdom to serve as the most eloquent and effective lesson for the immense majority of men in every age and country.

The over-burdened children of toil, to-day as in the days of Christ, as every day till time shall be no more, need the teaching and example of Joseph the son of royal David, and of Jesus the Incarnate Word, to enable them to find obscurity sweet, and obedience easy, and the persevering toil of years tolerable.

"There is more than that: we are, not unfrequently, tempted to think and say that the life of His Mother, the Second Eve, the model of her sex wherever Christianity prevails, is one of comparative nullity. . . . Is she then less admirable, because her life at Nazareth is merged in that of her Son? Let every woman who reads these pages, and takes time to ponder what is here intended, lay this truth to heart, that the future of the world, the greatness and happiness of every country, depend on the growth of true manhood within the obscurity and hallowed quiet of the Christian home. Every natural and supernatural virtue that goes to make up the true man in the home of the laborer and mechanic, as well as in that of the rich, the learned, the noble, and the great, is a fruit of the mother's sowing and ripening. We, in our day and generation, are impatient of home-restraints, of slow and progressive culture: one such son as David or Samuel is glory enough for any mother. When Christ left His loved retreat at Nazareth, and filled Judæa with His name, it was said of Him: 'He hath done all things well.' What mother could desire sweeter praise for her life-labors, or a more complete eulogy on her dearest one? And since Christ's

' life and examples have become an influence of every day and moment, during the past eighteen hundred years, how many mothers have found light and strength in the virtues which shine forth to the attentive eye within the lowly abode of Mary at Nazareth?"—(HEROIC WOMEN OF THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH, pp. 235, 236.)

As to Joseph, the blessed head of that holy household of Nazareth, the Gospel makes no further mention of him. He lived to rear, to the first years of manhood, that Jesus who loved to call him father. He died, as became one privileged beyond all men, blessed and loved, tended and cheered by the two beings to whom he had given his life. No Christian man and woman can think of the holy and devoted foster-father of the Saviour, and of the virtues which shine forth in his conduct, without saying that he was as "blessed among men" as Mary, his beloved companion, was "blessed among women."

IV.

It was natural that our Lord, during the eighteen last years of His life at Nazareth, should prepare His Mother for the trials which awaited them both in the fulfilment of His public mission. All through these three years it is probable that Mary lived habitually either in her own home at Nazareth, or at Capharnaum among her near relatives, the two sisters, mothers, respectively, of the Apostles James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and of James the younger and Jude, the sons of Alpheus. As to her occupation during this period, a twofold testimony, that of Celsus, an enemy of the Christian name, and that of Tertullian, throws some light upon the matter. The former says that Mary was one who supported herself by manual labor; the latter affirms substantially the same fact. Like her husband, Joseph, like the Incarnate Word, her Son, Mary helped to elevate, in her own person, the condition of the laborer, to make of labor itself a something sacred and divine.

Her first appearance, in the public life of our Lord, was in connection with the Marriage Feast in Cana—a town situated a few miles westward of Nazareth. This marriage was the occasion of bringing together our Lord and His Mother with the first disciples, who had openly acknowledged Him as the Messiah: these were Peter and Andrew, two brothers, and Philip and Nathanael—Galileans all four of them—and the nucleus of that band of believers, recruited chiefly from Galilee, who were to be, under God, the founders of Christianity in the East and West.

The marriage at Cana took place a few months after the Baptism of our Lord by John, the solemn proclamation of His Mission by the Precursor to the crowd near the Jordan, and the public miracle by which the Father and the Holy Spirit manifested His Sonship and Divinity. Then He retired into the wild mountain tracts near the river to spend forty entire days and nights in solitude, prayer, and abstinence from all food—setting to all apostolic men to the end of time an example which they must follow, if they would continue His work with fruit. Christianity, the divinity of Christian life, the spread of God-like Christian holiness—all are based upon self-denial, self-sacrifice, and habitual prayer. PRAYER is the very soul of holiness.

It has been the sense of the Church from the days of the apostles to our own, that this first miracle of our Lord, performed at the urgent solicitation of His Mother, gave a new and solemn sanction to the institution of matrimony. The sanctity and happiness of family life, the unity and permanence of the tie which, in the Christian home, binds to each other the father and the mother, the parents and the children, is the foundation of Christian society, Christian civilization. Christ, by assisting with His Mother and His

disciples, at this marriage ceremony and feast, and by sanctioning them with a public and stupendous miracle, wished us—the Church teaches—to understand that He thereby raised the primitive matrimonial ordinance to the rank of a Sacrament—"a Great Sacrament," as S. Paul calls it—blessing the whole stream of human existence in its source, by infusing into it His own blood and the merits of His passion, and nourishing the souls of regenerated humanity with the spiritual energy divinely connected with His sacraments.

It is but the simple truth to say, that Mary by her presence at this Marriage Feast, and by her active part in obtaining the stupendous miracle performed on the occasion, showed herself to be the true Mother of the New Life, the Second Eve whose pleading with the Second Adam resulted, not in the ruin, but in the elevation and sanctification of the human family.

One word about the seeming rebuke which our Lord addressed on this occasion to her. The festivities, as usual in the country and in that age, had lasted several days, and to them all, the near relatives, at least, of the wedded pair and their families had been invited. The wine—the home-made, wholesome growth of each farm throughout the land—gave out. Mary's watchful eye detected this, and the secret prompting of the Holy Spirit urged her to say to her Son: "They have no wine." It was a womanly and motherly act. He, however, for the sake of His future fellow-workers there present, as well as for the instruction of us all, will have her understand that what He is going to do, what she evidently expects Him to do, belongs to the Divine Order, in which the claims or obligations of flesh and blood must never influence the dispensers of God's mysteries. "And Jesus saith to her: Woman (lady, rather), what is it to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come. His Mother saith to the waiters: Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." The solemn hour, indeed, for proclaiming from the cross, at the very consummation of His mediatorial office, that she is His Mother and that He is her son, has not yet come. That was to be the hour of supreme love for both, of love united in the oblation and consummation of such suffering as the hearts of mother and son never endured before or since. It is clear that she does not take His answer for a rebuke. The eloquence of the miracle accomplished at her suggestion and entreaty should explain the "What is it to Me and to thee?" and do away with the obscurity or apparent harshness of the idiomatic expressions of a foreign language, or the style of address among a people so different in every way from ourselves.

On the other hand, the petition of the Blessed Mother has been held up as a model of the confidence and humility which should ever be found in prayer. She knows to Whom she pleads, she states in the simplest terms the need of her friends, and leaves the rest to the Almighty Goodness.

Such is also the way in which Martha and Mary represent the case of their brother Lazarus: "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick." In both cases, a miracle is asked for; in both it is granted; whereas it would have been refused, if the asking it had been deemed an unwarrantable interference with the power of the Man-God.

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. After this He went down to Capharnaum, He and His Mother, and His brethren, and His disciples; and they remained there not many days. And the Pasch of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."

The miracle just performed naturally bound His own kinsfolk to the Master. Accompanied by these "His brethren," and by His

disciples, He takes His Mother with Him to Capharnaum, then the most important city of Galilee, and the centre of a thriving commerce, favorably situated on the Lake of Gennesareth. This city was to be the chief centre of our Lord's public labors in Galilee during the three ensuing years. He did not then, however, fix His abode there and that of His Mother. He intended to return and to preach in Nazareth the truth concerning Himself and His mission—only, when His own townsfolk had rejected Him, would He seek a second home for His widowed Parent and Himself. Meanwhile, the celebration of the Pasch calls both Him and His Mother to Jerusalem. Hitherto, with the sole exception of His disputation with the doctors in His twelfth year, nothing had been done, or is recorded of Him as having been done, in Jerusalem, to assert His divine mission as the Messiah. On this memorable visit to the capital, He openly asserted His authority. He startled priests and people, indeed, the entire multitude of Jews from Palestine and other countries come to the Passover, by casting the traders out of the temple. To those who challenged His right to do such acts, He replied only by affirming that were the temple itself destroyed, He could rebuild it in three days. This, of course, was an obscure prophesy of His own return to life, three days after His death on the cross. His hearers did not understand Him, and only resolved to punish His temerity. He, however, must have pointed to His own body, the very Reality figured by the temple; for His disciples present on the occasion so understood His meaning, and remembered it three years afterward. But although He refused to perform a miracle to satisfy His enemies, S. John assures us that at this same Pasch in Jerusalem, "many believed in His name, seeing the signs which He did. But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men." Then also took place the secret interview with Nicodemus, as well as the discourse in which our Lord so emphatically asserted His mission and His divinity.

His Mother, who closely watched His every movement while in the capital, and who hung upon every word of His, could not help hearing the murmurs and threats of the Pharisees, as well as the praise of such as were drawn to Christ by His miracles and teaching. She returned with Him to Galilee as she had come, in the company of His disciples. He at once began, while yet in northern Judæa, near the Jordan, with them the work of teaching and baptizing (S. John iii. 22). At that very time John the Baptist was pursuing his holy labors on the banks of the Jordan, at Ennon (or Aenon), not far from the southern border of Galilee. The fame of Christ's teaching in the neighborhood, of His wondrous works, and of the many whom His disciples were baptizing, soon reached the ears of John. John's followers questioned him with regard to the authority which the Christ had for so doing. The answer of the Precursor contains the most solemn testimony in all the Gospel to the Mission of Christ and to His Divinity. "You yourselves do bear me witness, that I said *I am not CHRIST, but that I am sent before HIM.* He that hath the Bride, is the Bridegroom: but the friend of the Bridegroom, who standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth with joy because of the Bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above, is above all. He that is of earth, of the earth he is, and of the earth he speaketh. He that cometh from Heaven is above all. And what He hath seen and heard, that He testifieth; and no man receiveth His testimony. He that hath received His testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true. For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God doth not give the Spirit by measure [to Him]. The Father loveth

the Son; and He hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth in the Son hath life everlasting; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth in him."

How consistent is the conduct of the holy son of Elizabeth with the prediction of the Archangel Gabriel, when he foretold his birth and his mission toward Christ! And how the echo of this glorious testimony, reaching the Blessed Virgin, who had not yet parted from Christ and His disciples, must have filled her soul with joy! "I am not [the] Christ. . . . I am sent before Him. . . . He must increase, but I must decrease." The small band of believers who now follow the Messiah must go on increasing, till the society they form fills Judæa and Galilee, till it spreads beyond Palestine and Asia, and fills the whole earth. "I must decrease;" my disciples are only prepared for the teaching of the Divine Master. He is the Heavenly Bridegroom to whom belongs the Bride, the Church to be redeemed by His blood and born anew of the baptism which typifies it. How can I, His friend and Precursor, not rejoice, when He is so near me, when the voice of His teaching and the fame of His miracles reach my ears? What am I, what are all the preceding prophets, compared to Him who "cometh from above," and "is above all?" "He that is of the earth, of the earth he is, and of the earth he speaketh." I am earth-born, a poor child of human parentage, like you all, with the feelings of human nature, and its limited knowledge and still more limited power. "But He that cometh from Heaven," the Word co-eternal with the Father, born of Him before the earth was, who testifieth among us only to what He hath seen in His Father's bosom and what He hath heard from Him who is the Essential Truth and Holiness, who sets the seal of divinity to His teaching by the miracles we behold—how is it that "no man receiveth His testimony?"

It is a tremendous condemnation of Jewish chicanery and incredulity.

From the neighborhood of Ennon our Lord with His company "returned in the power of the Spirit, into Galilee, and the fame of Him went out through the whole country. And He taught in their synagogues, and was magnified by all." So writes S. Luke. But S. Matthew, who was himself a Galilean, adds further particulars. "And coming into His own country, He taught them in their synagogues, so that they wondered and said: How came this man by this wisdom and [these] miracles?" The miracles were the credentials, the seal of His mission, the attestation that His "wisdom" was not of earth but of Heaven. They were too earthly and grovelling to rise above their own low ideas and prejudices. But the Messiah wished to preach to the city in which He had spent childhood and youth, before He began the circuit of all Galilee. It is a great event in the History of His blessed Mother, as it seems to have severed her connection with her native place.

And He came to Nazareth, where He was brought up; and He went into the synagogue according to His custom, on the Sabbath day. And He rose up to read; and the book of Isaías the prophet was delivered unto Him. And as He unfolded the book, He found the place where it was written: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; wherefore He hath anointed Me; to preach the Gospel to the poor He hath sent Me, to heal the contrite (broken) of heart; to preach deliverance to the captives, and sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward.* And when He had folded the book, He restored it to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them: This day is fulfilled this Scripture in your ears. And all gave testimony to Him; and they wondered at the words of grace that proceeded

from His mouth, and they said: *Is not this the son of Joseph?* And He said to them: Doubtless you will say to Me this similitude, ‘Physician, heal thyself:’ as great things as we have heard [that you have] done in Capharnaum, do also here in Thy own country.”

This is the same challenge to perform miracles before their eyes, which the Jews made to Him in Jerusalem. The speakers are animated only by a mixture of curiosity and envy. The well-attested miracles performed in their immediate neighborhood, at Cana, as well as in the city of Capharnaum, together with those which heralded His return to Galilee, should have disposed His own townsmen to listen to that “wisdom,” and to bow to the authority of Him who challenged their belief in Him, as the Messiah described in Isaías. And then comes the sudden ending of His work in their midst.

“Amen, I say to you, that no prophet is accepted in his own country. In truth I say to you, there were many widows in the days of Elias in Israel, when Heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there was a great famine throughout all the earth. And to none of them was Elias sent, but to Sarepta of Sidon, to a widow woman. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, hearing these things, were filled with anger. And they rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they brought Him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong. But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way.” (S. Luke iv.)

The Blessed Mother was a witness of all this scene. Need we describe her agony of apprehension, while the blind and sacrilegious crowd dragged their Messiah to the cruel death they wished to inflict? or her grief at seeing her own people rejecting the Saviour, and closing to themselves every road to salvation?

From Nazareth our Lord directed His steps to Capharnaum, where His Mother and His disciples soon joined Him. There He recruited His apostles, Mary, meanwhile, finding a welcome in the family of her “sister” or near kinswoman, Mary, the wife of Zebedee, whose two sons, James and John, attached themselves to our Lord.

How far Christ permitted, during His repeated missionary circuits through Galilee and its “hundred cities,” His Mother to accompany Him, we cannot say from the Gospel narrative or from tradition. We know that a band of devoted Galilean women ministered to His wants and those of His disciples during the three years of His public life. It would be against all probability to suppose that His Blessed Mother should have had no share in these ministrations.

At any rate, she must have been with Him in Jerusalem during the celebration of the second Pasch, mentioned by S. John (v. 1-47). After this occurred the Sermon on the Mount, the healing of the Centurion’s servant, and the resurrection of the widow’s son at Naim, as well as Christ’s second circuit of Galilee. The hatred of His enemies, the scribes and Pharisees, was becoming daily more open, and more threatening. Rumors circulated of serious peril to the Master’s safety. John the Baptist had already been imprisoned by Herod Antipas, brother of Archelaus, and tetrarch of Galilee. So the Blessed Mother, alarmed by these flying rumors, hastened with some of her kinsfolk to the scene of our Lord’s preaching. Then happened that incident from which non-Catholic readers of the Gospel draw an inference most injurious to Christ and to His Mother. The multitudes that surrounded Him night

and day, and the demands upon His time, were such that He had not even leisure “to eat bread.” “And it was told Him: Thy Mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to see Thee. Who, answering, said to them, My Mother and My brethren are they who hear the word of God, and do it.” We know, by His taking His Mother with Him to Capharnaum, after the Miracle of Cana, and by His appearing in the synagogue at Nazareth, proclaiming Himself the Messiah, without denying that Mary was His Mother—how far it was from the mind of our Lord, by word or act, to deny or to slight His Mother and her relatives. This would not be the act of a dutiful and loving son. But He was on His Messianic work; and He would have all understand, that its freedom and dignity required of all engaged in it to be above the cares and claims of family or relationship; just as elsewhere He says to the young man called to follow Him, and asking to go home and bury his father, “Allow the dead to bury their dead.”

V.

It is in the last stage of His mortal career that we shall find His Mother by His side. She had heard of His utterance about His approaching death: “Behold we go up to Jerusalem; and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man. For He shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon.” Every mother’s heart is prophetic of coming sorrow: how much more so the Mother to whom Simeon had foretold suffering unutterable, incomprehensible?

She is not mentioned as having been present during His triumphant entry into Jerusalem; although it is most unlikely that she would not, with the pious women from Galilee and His other devoted disciples, have joined Him on His way to the capital on this last visit. But if Mary was anxious to shun the pageants in her Son’s honor, she would be present when the hour of humiliation came.

We are never to forget that, in our Lord’s Passion, the Godhead personally and inseparably united to our humanity in His Person, eclipsed Itself, as it were, and allowed the Man, as man, to suffer, to expiate, to atone for His brethren of the entire race of Adam. It was only at the supreme moment of desolation and agony that the Son was to be visibly sustained by His Mother. Tradition affirms, and the Church authorizes the tradition, that, on His way to Calvary, He met His Mother, as if she could not be withheld from acknowledging as her own Son, the Man of Sorrows whom they have been scourging, crowning with thorns, condemning, like the most abominable of criminals, to be crucified between two men, who were thieves and murderers.

During the memorable passage through the Red Sea, Moses had by his side Mary, the Deliverer, his heroic sister, the Mother of her people. When Jesus, the true Moses, was treading the streets of Jerusalem, bearing a portion of, at least, His own cross, when the multitude, athirst for His blood, divided on His way, mocking, deriding, cursing; His Mother, that Mary who is mother to us all, walked by His side, setting her foot firmly in every depth of shame and bitterness to which He had to descend.

And there she stands beneath the Cross on Calvary! “Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus, His Mother and His Mother’s sister Mary [wife] of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen. When Jesus therefore had seen His Mother and the disciples standing, whom He loved, He said to His Mother, Woman, behold thy son. After that He saith to the disciple: Behold thy Mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own.” Solitude for her welfare is uppermost in the mind of the Divine Sufferer. Let us read it

the light of these words of His, the narrative of the Evangelists regarding the last three years of His life: is it likely that her welfare, her comfort, her happiness ever ceased to be His care?

Of course, to all who believed in Christ, and who, in these first years, risked everything by openly confessing Him, the Blessed Mother was an object of special and filial veneration. This was particularly true of the apostles, who felt like their disciples that in reverencing and honoring the Mother they were honoring and reverencing the Son. S. John was now privileged to hold Christ's place toward her. The last time she is mentioned by name in the New Testament is in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where we find her with her near relatives in the assembly which elected S. Matthias. So long as S. John remained in Jerusalem Mary was his charge, cherished and revered by that Virgin Apostle. When, at the dispersion of the apostles, John went to reside in Ephesus, thither also Mary went with him. It is probable, however, that as John, like the other apostles, traveled through Palestine and Asia Minor, preaching the Gospel, founding new churches, and confirming in the faith such as already existed, that his adopted mother did not separate from him. Not before the decade intervening between the years 60 and 70 of the present era, did the Beloved Disciple assume at Ephesus the government of all the churches of Anterior Asia. If our Blessed Lady died between these dates, she must have passed her eightieth year. Tradition in the Church always assigned the night of August 14-15 as the date of her passage to a happy immortality. On the 15th of August the Church has always celebrated her Assumption, that is, her being received into Heaven in body and soul. It was but proper that the body which had known nothing of sin or stain, the body of the Mother of our Ransom on the Cross, should not have been touched by the corruption of the grave. All the bitterness of death had passed over her soul on Calvary: her own death was all peace and sweetness and unspeakable anticipation of the eternal reunion with her Son, her Saviour, her God.

It must seem, to every candid and reflecting mind, both natural and logical, that Christians, from the day when Christ first began to have followers and worshippers, should have shown to His Mother a singular reverence. The Apostles, the early disciples, whose faith had never wavered, or had only been temporarily shaken, during the Saviour's brief but necessary period of suffering, must have felt their veneration for the heroic Mother very much increased by the preternatural courage she displayed in His hour of bitter and mortal trial.

The narrative of S. John is sublime in its simplicity and brevity. It is the tradition of the Eastern Church, derived from the first believers in Jerusalem—from the contemporaries and relatives of our Lord and His Mother, that “the coat without seam, woven from the top throughout,” for which the Roman soldiers cast lots, while He, the wearer, was hanging in His death-agony overhead—was the fruit of her labor of love. Like the saintly mother of the child-prophet Samuel, Mary would allow no hands but her own to weave her Son His principal garment. It might be said to be His sole worldly wealth; and His executioners cast lots for it, while she was looking on, or within reach of their discussion. . . . “And the soldiers indeed did these things. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His Mother, and His Mother's sister, Mary (wife) of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen. . . .” Then ensued the bequeathing to the Beloved Disciple of the dearest earthly treasure possessed by Jesus of Nazareth—His widowed and homeless Mother. She, however, had been too willing a learner in His school, too close an imitator of His divine examples, to repine at

her poverty and homelessness. Her sorest trial was her separation from Him.

When the short joys of the Forty Days' converse with Him after His resurrection, were ended—she had been too well enlightened by Him not to understand that the divinest work yet reserved to her by Providence, remained to be fulfilled. This was, that, as she had been the Mother of the Body given on the cross as the ransom for the entire race of man, as she had nursed that Body with more than a mother's devotion—so now she should devote the remaining years of her life to forming His mystic body, His church.

As the body of the faithful grew, first in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine, and next through all the countries of Asia, Africa, and Europe—the divinity of Christ was more openly, more solemnly, more courageously affirmed. Men and women everywhere bore witness to it by suffering imprisonment, stripes, and death. They honored their belief by leading God-like lives, even when these were not crowned by the glory of martyrdom.

It is the constant affirmation of Christian writers, that Christ's Blessed Mother, all through these trial-full years of the infant Church, was to Apostles, disciples, and believers of every class a model and a comforter, all that a mother and such a Mother, should be. We find, that when the Apostles returned to Jerusalem, after the Ascension, they went to where our Blessed Lady was staying—in the house of that saintly Mary, “the mother of John-Mark” (Acts xii. 12). This is the house, according to the most venerable traditions, in which our Lord celebrated the Last Supper, which was the first place of meeting and divine worship for believers in Jerusalem. It was the centre and nursery of Christianity in the great city all through this first period of persecution, loving labor, and wonderful growth. “And when they were come in (from Mount Olivet), they went up into an Upper Room, where abode Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James and Alpheus and Simon Zelotes, and Jude (the brother) of James. All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.”

In the election of S. Matthias, which is next recorded, and which evidently took place in the same spacious Upper Room, as well as in the assembly on the Day of Pentecost, the text indicates that she was also present. It was a matter of course, that His Mother should be the very soul of these meetings, although it was left to Peter and his brother-Apostles to regulate everything that pertained to the doctrine and discipline of the Christian society. All through the triumphs and trials which, alternately, awaited the Apostolic labors, Mary was present to cheer, encourage, and sustain. What joy filled her soul, when on that very day of Pentecost, after S. Peter's inspired address to the multitude, no less than “three thousand souls” were baptized and added to the body of the faithful! “And they were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: many wonders also and signs were done by the Apostles in Jerusalem; and there was great fear in all. And all they that believed, were together, and had all things in common. Their possessions and goods they sold, and divided them to all, according as every one had need. And continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord increased daily together such as should be saved.”

What a blessed and blissful family was that which daily increased around the Second Eve, the Mother of the New Life! Heroic

prayer, heroic poverty, heroic charity: one mind, one heart, one faith; brother sharing with brother earthly goods as well as divinest graces—and the supernatural fervor of all fed and sustained by that "Supersubstantial Bread," the "communication" of which, like a heavenly fire kindled in the hearts of the receivers, made men and women the light of the world, and the Gift within them shed abroad, wherever they went, the sweet odor of Christ.

Surely the sons of the "Valiant Woman" were rising up before the nations and calling her "Blessed"—aye. "Blessed among women."

VI.

It is usual with Protestants, in speaking of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to show a repugnance to calling her "the Mother of God." In so doing, they are doing, unawares, what Nestorius and his master, Theodore (afterward Bishop of Mopsuestia), a teacher in the school of Antioch, openly taught people to do in the beginning of the fifth century. In the preceding centuries such men as Origen, S. Alexander of Alexandria, and S. Athanasius, only expressed the common belief and orthodox sense of Christians, by emphatically calling Mary "the Mother of God."

Arianism and Nestorianism are the legitimate parents of modern Unitarianism. Arius denied the divinity of the Son of God, and therefore refused to Christ, the Incarnate Son, the title and quality of true God. Theodore and Nestorius, while admitting that the Son was God, denied that the man Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, was in any sense true God. "It is madness to say" (such are his words) "God was born of the Virgin; not God, but the temple in which God dwelt was born of Mary." These false teachers affirmed that the Divine Word had His dwelling in every human soul; but in Christ He manifested extraordinary power. He participated of the glory of the Word and Son more than any other human being; but it was only, after all, a difference in degree. It was, according to them, an error to say "God was born of the Virgin Mary," "God suffered, rose again from the tomb, and ascended into Heaven." These things could only be affirmed of human nature.

The whole Nestorian controversy thus turned on the great dogma, or doctrinal fact, whether Mary was and should be called "the Mother of God." On June 22d, 431, a general council assembled at Ephesus—the city in which Mary had spent the last years of her life, and which cherished toward her a deep and tender piety. The cathedral church in which the 160 bishops met, under the presidency of S. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, who represented Pope S. Celestine I.—was named in honor of "the Mother of God." The session lasted far into the night, and the doctrine of Nestorius and his school was solemnly condemned—the Blessed Virgin Mary was declared to be truly θεοτόκος, Mother of God.

The city, thereupon, was spontaneously illuminated, and the bishops, on issuing from the cathedral, were escorted to their lodgings by the joyous multitude, bearing lighted torches, and breaking forth into hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

It must not be forgotten that it was the Person of Christ Himself, at once both true God and true man, who thus triumphed in this solemn definition of faith. The heretics denied that the Son of the Virgin Mary was God; the bishops of the East and West assembled affirmed that He was, and that she was most truly Mother of God.

Her honor, therefore, was reflected on her Son. But, while He is very God, she is only a human being; she, the Mother of Christ, is only a creature—the most highly honored indeed of all created beings; while He is Creator.

In going back to the time of the Council of Ephesus, A. D. 431—two years before S. Patrick, sent by the same Pope Celestine I., landed in Pagan Ireland, we are amazed to find, in the writings of such men as S. Cyril of Alexandria, and in the authentic descriptions of popular manners among Eastern Christians, how deeply reverence for the Mother of God had penetrated all classes in the community. The great Christian writers of that and the preceding century—these saintly men whom we call the Fathers of the Church, speak of Mary, not only as the Mother of God, but as the "Second Eve." Long before them, one whose doctrine was derived from the immediate disciples of the Apostles—S. Irenæus—draws out an elaborate parallel between Mary and the first Eve. "Mary, by her obedience, became both to herself and to all mankind the cause of salvation. . . . The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by Mary's obedience. . . . What the Virgin Eve bound by unbelief, that the Virgin Mary unbound by faith. . . . As by a Virgin the human race had been given over to death, so by a Virgin it is saved."

It is also to be remarked here, that just as the title "Virgin Mother" was given to the Church by the early Fathers, so we find them applying the same prophetic passages of Scripture both to the Virgin Mother of Christ, and to His spouse the Church, who is the Virginal Mother of His children here below. Indeed, it is but natural to assume that she who is the Parent of Christ our Head, entertains all a parent's affection for His members, and performs towards them throughout the ages, both in Heaven and on earth, all a Mother's offices of love and watchfulness.

Hence, the constant application now to the Church, and now to the Immaculate Mother, of that passage in Apocalypse xii. 1: "And a great sign appeared in Heaven, a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered. And there was seen another sign in Heaven: and behold a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns. . . . And the dragon stood before the woman, who was ready to be delivered, that, when she should be delivered, he might devour her son. . . . And her son was taken up to God and to His throne. And there was a great battle in Heaven; Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels. . . . And that great dragon was cast out, that OLD SERPENT, who is called the Devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world."

It is only carrying out the idea of S. Irenæus, to see the conflict prophesied in Genesis iii. 14, 15, at the very beginning of Revealed History, described as it happened in the last half of the first century of Christianity, as it has continued down to our own day. The Second Eve is foretold to the First in the memorable passage: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel. To the woman also He said: I will multiply thy sorrows, and thy conceptions: in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children. . . ."

The enemy of God and of mankind has never ceased from that day till now, to make war on God's children here below; in the Old Law on the Church which God established through Moses—amid what "sorrows" did she bring forth sons to God! In the New Law, how the battle has gone on, between the Church of Christ and the seven-headed serpent of Heresy—ever watchful to devour each generation of Christians! It is surely IN SORROW, especially in our days, that the Church brings forth her children; and she needs the embattled hosts of Michael, invisibly aiding her, to cast out the Old Serpent, the Adversary.